

Research on the Cultural Expression of Video Game Visual Images in the Cyberpunk Context - A Case Study of Cyberpunk 2077

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Abstract:

According to the content of cyberpunk games, this paper takes “Cyberpunk 2077” as an example, lists three core motifs, which are: cyberpunk, cyberspace and dystopian world view, analyzes the cultural expression and aesthetic construction of this culture in video games. Video games are a form of expression that integrates a variety of products, with strong inclusiveness. Starting from the cultural expression in the visual images of “Cyberpunk 2077”, this paper explores the characteristics of Chinese video games in the shaping of cyberspace and cyberpunk, and finds a new direction for Chinese video game creation.

Keywords:

Cyberpunk, Video Games, Cultural Expression, Visual Image

1. Introduction

After decades of rapid development of video games, a variety of themes have emerged. Science fiction is a popular theme under video games. Cyberpunk stands out in the sci-fi genre because of its unique visual image presentation effect and humanistic setting, and has been focused by the majority of game designers.

Cyberpunk is a combination of Cyber (cybernetics) and Punk (punk). Cyber, a concept proposed by Norbert Wiener in 1948, is a science about industrial design and biological design, which is based on information and feedback. Punk, originating from rock music in the 1970s, has evolved into a cultural symbol representing the pursuit of liberation. The word Cyberpunk combines the above two concepts, with the ideological spirit of dystopia and the pursuit of individual freedom. [1] The game with Cyberpunk elements first appeared in the mid-1980s, named Cyberpunk, which is a traditional board game. With the progress of science and technology, Cyberpunk elements were put on the screen, and Cyberpunk 2077 is a famous work with the same type of elements in recent years.

In 2017, the State Council of the People's Republic of China designated May 10th as "China Brand Day", and in May 2018, "Tmall" launched the "National Tide" marketing plan in order to support traditional brands. [2] Promoted the rise of "national trend" culture. After several transformations, "national trend" is no longer limited to a single field, and the focus of "national trend" is to enhance Chinese cultural confidence. The electronic game combining Chinese traditional culture and cyberpunk elements can become the carrier of "national trend" culture, providing new ideas for the creation of Chinese video games.

2. The Motif Kernel Contained in Cyberpunk

2.1. Cyberpunk: the dilemma of self-identity

Cyberpunk refers to the "self-regulating human-machine system" [3], which is a technical term. Generally speaking, it is the synthesis of human and machine with artificial structure and function. Cyberpunk challenges the traditional human attributes and has two identities: one is human identity, and the other is intelligent product. According to the different ways of intelligent products intervening in the human body, "cyberpunk" roles are divided into virtual existence and physical existence. The physical existence is often represented as bionic man or ethic man, which leads to the double dilemma of memory and identity. In the future capital world depicted in it, human organs and skin become a tool that can be bought and sold, and also become a means of "showing off". Technology not only brings infinite possibilities, but also brings people's dilemma of self-identity. People can get more powerful physiological functions through prosthetic transformation, which is an anomaly in the society dominated by natural people. The works with cyberpunk elements are to discuss these issues of individual identity in the distant future in front of the audience.

2.2. Cyberspace: the network digital living space

The popularity of personal computers, the invention of Internet technology and the popularity of electronic games have given rise to the popularity of the concept of cyberspace. The concept of cyberspace began in the 1980s. In the literary work "Neurotraveler" created by William, he defined cyberspace as a "consensual hallucination" simulated by computers. [4] The transmission of science fiction art has promoted the development of cyberpunk in the art and literature circles, opening up a broader cultural space. In cyberspace, the simulation of fluid, gravity, physical collision and other simulated senses in the objective world can be simulated by code, which is not restricted by the laws of nature, simulating the "super real". For example, in "The Matrix", human beings enter the artificial intelligence "matrix" to enter the digital simulation of 1999, in which they can complete flight, slow down time and other behaviors by manipulating code, and ordinary people can not distinguish between virtual and reality.

2.3. Worldview: the presentation of dystopian futurism

The visual and anti-traditional cultural features in Cyberpunk make it break through the scope of literature and turn to more fields. Birth in the real era of the beginning of globalization, Cyberpunk describes the resistance to the totalitarian rule of society under the influence of totalitarian organizations, which is the spiritual core of Cyberpunk. In the worldview of Cyberpunk, the city is divided into two areas, with futuristic high-rises on one end and low, old and poor residential buildings on the

other end, adjacent to each other. [5] Although there is no obvious division in the landscape, there is an unbridgeable gap in the spirit. After the exploited realize that they are in a difficult situation through some opportunities, they will promote individual consciousness and generate resistance consciousness due to various factors, and then fight against the giant system.

3. Aesthetic Construction and Cultural Expression in Cyberpunk 2077

Cyberpunk 2077 is a role-playing game developed and produced by CD Projekt RED. Its story takes place in a fictional city called “Night City”. The player plays the role of mercenary “V”, who thinks that for various reasons, people need to live in the “Night City”. In this city, the government collapsed and the progress of science and technology led to the decline of national authority, the long-term rule of gang violence, and the emergence of financial oligarchy. The city is divided into seven regions, showing a bipolar trend and serious class solidification. The rich enjoy the life brought by scientific and technological progress, while the people at the bottom live in the depths of misery, running around for food and clothing.

3.1. Cold Thinking: Behind the Strong Visual Effect

In “Cyberpunk 2077”, the color light source is mostly the color with high saturation and obvious visual contrast. The neon lights in the city corners further strengthen the color expression and give people sensory stimulation. The game maker has set four new nouns for the game, corresponding to different styles to represent different classes of people, namely: neo-militarism, kitschism, neo-kitschism, and sazenism. The neo-militarism style pays attention to the quiet elegance, is the collision between classical and functional, has the color of deconstruction, and “reality is greater than external” is the core of the style, which is commonly seen in the rich and powerful class in the city. The kitsch style is a non-mainstream cultural movement in the game, represented by bold colors and bright plastics, symbolizing chaos and rebellion, commonly seen in nightclubs, street gangs and other places. The neo-keggish style is that the super rich grab the surface aesthetic features and distort the ideological core into a very rich life without admitting the keggish cultural motive and being tired of the coldness of militarism. The growthism style emerged as the times require after the outbreak of war, with practicality as the first element, and “demand is higher than appearance” as the core of its style. [6]

In “Cyberpunk 2077”, the progress of science and technology and the turmoil of society awaken people’s body perception, and desire is raised to a very high level. Medical technology greatly liberates the body. Orthotics shops are everywhere, and the protagonist “V” transforms the orthotics in order to survive. But with the increase of orthotics, it will bring burden to people’s spirit, and eventually become a “cyber madman” without reason. Behind the visual pleasure brought to players by “Cyberpunk 2077”, it also brings about the discussion of people in the cyberpunk world. For example, when people replace all their organs except the brain with machines, whether the self still remains the same, upload the consciousness to the “cloud” server, and how to distinguish reality. In Kant’s moral philosophy, human independence and equality have a very lofty status. In the world of Cyberpunk, the copyability leads to the devaluation of individual value, making “ethical man” an emotionless thing. Cyberpunk uses its unique language to let players perceive and think about the nature of human individuals.

3.2. Dual opposition: metaphor in urban architecture

“City of Night” is a city independent of the federal government and free states. Here, top resources and intelligence are gathered, while criminals of all shapes and sizes such as gangs, cults and thugs can be seen everywhere. The color of the superstructure of the urban landscape is mainly cool, and the materials are constructed with metal, steel, cement and other raw materials. The buildings are towering and extremely rational. Institutions with absolute power are located here, such as Arashiyama Company, military technology company, etc., and under the shell of a sense of order is the expansion of material desire. In the alleys between the buildings, there are a variety of neon signs, presenting mixed cultural elements. Adjacent to it is the living environment of the lower class, which is dark and damp, crowded with people. There are casinos set up in the corridors between the communities, where violent incidents and crimes occur. [7]

The opposition layout between the upper mega-structure buildings and the dense community below makes the environment space complex and orderly, and the scene is unreal and real. One side is shiny and bright, and the other side is full of life, which is high and accessible. [8] “Cyberpunk 2077” incisively and vividly expresses the binary opposition space aesthetics contained in cyberpunk. Cyberpunk reveals the problems that may happen now and in Brunei through the imagination of future society, and more is a warning for the present.

4. Future and History: the Visual Image Expression of Cyberpunk in Game Art

In the context of cyberpunk, the world outlook revolves around the future and technological architecture, and the ethical conflicts between science, environment and people have become the core of cyberpunk cultural creation. Science fiction is the element that always accompanies cyberpunk after the transition from text to visual works. For example, the performance of the visual effects of the fault in the movie “Blade Runner 2049” are all science fiction elements that depict the future. “Giant” and “oppression” are the visual intuitive feelings in the context of cyberpunk. The contemporary known elements are used as the basis for the composition of visual images, and then the things in the future are imagined, which is specifically reflected in the details of the image. For example, in the game Deus Ex, released in 2000, the game items in the cyberpunk context are set as landlines in design, while later works do not have such item settings. Based on the current scientific and technological level, the future is constructed.

The interactivity of video games makes the image from unilateral information feedback to two-way communication. Cyberpunk images in video games are assisted by CGI special effects, and the visual expression stays at the two-dimensional level. With the rise of VR technology, perhaps the visual images of cyberpunk style are no longer limited to two-dimensional expression but move towards three-dimensional expression. Cyberpunk itself is inclusive, and the visual images that constitute it come from the creator itself. The creator needs to have a good level of knowledge reserve, understand the current cutting-edge information, judge and think about the information, clarify the creation logic, improve the creation level and vision in multiple dimensions, grasp the present in the constantly advancing society, find the position of Chinese culture identity, and then provide a new imagination for the future world space.

5. Conclusions

The development of the times and the progress of science and technology make the future unpredictable. Cyberpunk has strong inclusiveness. Grasping its core spirit is helpful to improve the performance at the visual level. As a video game in the context of cyberpunk, “Cyberpunk 2077” has built a surreal world full of visual tension for players, which is familiar and unfamiliar. Nowadays, Chinese game players have a certain appreciation ability and aesthetic level, and it is difficult to impress players by simple imitation. The dialectical relationship between science and technology, politics and self in the future world gives cyberpunk “life”. The design of cyberpunk games in China should not only stay at the visual level, but also combine it with the profound culture of our country, which will surely give a unique color to the field of video games in China.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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